



U.S. EMBASSY PRAGUE AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES NEWSLETTER

Trziste 15, 118 01 Prague 1

December 2012

Sending Packages to the Czech Republic

Many U.S. citizens living abroad look forward to their relatives in the States sending them or their family gifts over the holiday season that remind them of home.

To help avoid difficulties with customs, we encourage U.S. citizens to be aware of the customs rules governing international mail. Particularly notable is the requirement that anything declared as having a value of more than 22 Euros must have VAT paid before being released.

Please review information available on the [Ceská Pošta](http://ceska-posta.cz) website to avoid mail-related stress during the holidays!



Greetings from ACS

We would like to remind you and your family to remain vigilant as you go about your holiday shopping and enjoying the festive atmosphere throughout the Czech Republic.

Incidents of pick-pocketing were reported in significant numbers during 2012, often taking place on trains, trams, and the metro. Please pay special attention in restaurants, train stations, and on public transportation around city centers.

Happy holidays to you and your loved ones and best wishes for the new year!

American Citizen Services
U.S. Embassy Prague



Season's Greetings from U.S. Embassy Prague

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In recognition of Czech and American national holidays, U.S. Embassy Prague will be closed on the following days during the months of December and January:

Monday, December 24, 2012
Tuesday, December 25, 2012
Wednesday, December 26, 2012
Tuesday, January 1, 2013
Monday, January 21, 2013

Christmas Eve (Czech)
Christmas Day (U.S. & Czech)
Boxing Day (Czech)
New Year's Day (U.S. & Czech)
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (U.S.)

Contact American Citizen Services

ACSPRG@state.gov

Open 8:30AM -12:00 PM Monday through Friday

By appointment only (except for emergencies)

<http://prague.usembassy.gov>

420-257-022-000

Beware of Identity Theft



What is identity theft?

Identity theft occurs when someone uses your personally identifying information, like your name, Social Security number, or credit card number, without your permission, to commit fraud or other crimes. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission estimates that as many as 9 million Americans have their identities stolen each year.

The crime takes many forms. Identity thieves may rent an apartment, obtain a credit card, or establish a telephone account in your name. You may not find out about the theft until you review your credit report or credit card statement and notice charges you didn't make - or until you're contacted by a debt collector.

Identity theft is serious. While some identity theft victims can resolve their problems quickly, others spend hundreds of dollars and many days repairing damage to their good name and credit record. Some consumers victimized by identity theft may lose out on job opportunities, or be denied loans for education, housing or cars because of negative information on their credit reports. In rare cases, they may even be arrested for crimes they did not commit.

This U.S. Federal Trade Commission's website [AVOID](#) is a one-stop resource to learn about the crime of identity theft and provides detailed information to help you **deter**, **detect**, and **defend** against this serious crime.

American Citizen Services Appointment Registration System

The American Citizen Services section of U.S. Embassy Prague provides routine consular services to American citizens by appointment only. The [reservation system](#) allows us to better serve the American citizen community in Prague by reducing wait times and ensuring that your visit to the Embassy is as efficient as possible. Making appointments for routine services such as non-emergency passports, Consular Reports of Birth Abroad, extra passport pages, and notarial services is easy and free of charge. Appointments may be made online by visiting our [reservation system](#).

Please visit our website for additional information: <http://prague.usembassy.gov>.

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SCHENGEN FACT SHEET

There are 26 European countries that are party to the Schengen agreement, which eliminates internal border controls between them. Once you enter one Schengen country you may travel continuously for up to 90 days among the member countries.

If you are **traveling for business or tourism**:

- ♦ You **don't need a visa** for the initial entry into the Schengen area, but you must have a passport valid three months beyond the proposed stay. For example, for a two-week business trip, the passport must be valid for four months; for a two-month holiday the passport must be valid for five months.

Note: Travelers for business or tourism are permitted to stay in the Schengen area for 90 days **within a six month period**. Once the 90 day maximum is reached, leaving for a brief period and re-entering the area does not entitle a traveler to 90 more days within the Schengen states. The traveler would have to remain outside of the Schengen zone for 90 days before reentering without a visa.

If you are **traveling for reasons other than business or tourism** (employment, study, internship, etc.):

- ♦ You **may need to obtain a visa** before you leave the U.S. depending on the host country. Check with the Embassy or Consulate of the country or countries to which you are traveling for their specific requirements. The State Department's [Foreign Embassies](#) webpage contains our most updated list of websites for foreign missions located in the U.S. .

Although European Union regulations require that non-EU visitors obtain a stamp in their passports upon initial entry to a Schengen country, many borders are not staffed with officers carrying out this function. If you want to be sure your entry is properly documented, you must ask for a stamp at an official point of entry. Without the stamp, you may be questioned and asked to prove how long you have been staying in Schengen countries when you leave.

The 26 member countries of the Schengen agreement zone are:

- ♦ Austria
- ♦ Belgium
- ♦ Czech Republic
- ♦ Denmark
- ♦ Estonia
- ♦ Finland
- ♦ France
- ♦ Germany
- ♦ Greece
- ♦ Hungary
- ♦ Iceland
- ♦ Italy
- ♦ Latvia



- ♦ Liechtenstein
- ♦ Lithuania
- ♦ Luxembourg
- ♦ Malta
- ♦ Netherlands
- ♦ Norway
- ♦ Poland
- ♦ Portugal
- ♦ Slovak Republic
- ♦ Slovenia
- ♦ Spain
- ♦ Sweden
- ♦ Switzerland



Thank you to all those U.S. citizens resident in the Czech Republic who participated in the 2012 U.S. General Elections. During this election cycle U.S. Embassy Prague was pleased to support over 5,000 U.S. citizens by providing voting information, assisting in the voter registration process, and returning overseas absentee ballots to the U.S.

How can I vote better next time around?

Despite our outreach activities, many people continue to be under the impression that they may come into the embassy on Election Day and cast their ballot. This is not the case. Each state has a different cutoff date for registering, requesting ballots, postmarking ballots, and receiving returned voted ballots. For the next election, please check with the [Federal Voting Assistance Program](#) website well before election day and confirm what your state wants you to do in order to cast your vote.

New absentee voting laws went into effect for the 2012 elections. Overseas voters no longer automatically receive ballots based on a previous absentee ballot request. All U.S. citizens outside of the United States who want to vote by absentee ballot in primary and general elections must now complete a new Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) **every year** if they wish to vote from abroad.

The Consular Section staff at U.S. Embassy Prague is ready to assist with completing your Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) - the form you need to complete to participate in U.S. elections as an overseas absentee voter. Our purpose is to inform and educate you about your voting rights, to ensure you are able to exercise your right to participate in elections for federal offices (President, Vice President, Senator, and Representative), and to assist with voting in state or local elections, if allowed by your state. We pride ourselves in being resources you can count on to help you answer voting questions, but for your vote to count, you need to be prepared early.

American essayist G.J. Nathan said “bad officials are elected by good citizens who do not vote.” For the next election cycle, please prepare in advance and make your sure that your vote counts.

